



Faithful obedient following of the Prophet has degrees¹

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Praise be to Allah Most High and peace be upon His servants who are rightly guided.

Know, therefore, that obedient following of the Prophet, upon him and his family be peace and blessings, is the fount of every good whether earthly or heavenly and has degrees.

The first degree. This is the degree of the generality of the people of Islam [consisting of] obedience to the rulings of the Sacred Law and compliance to the noble pattern (*sunna*) after one has a conviction [in the basic creedal beliefs] of the heart but *before* the *nafs* has attained to tranquility (*itmi'nān*), it being of the station of proximity (*wilāya*). The generality of the people of Islam are co-sharers in this [first] degree of compliance and they all have an equal footing in the *form* of obedient following, this is so because the *nafs* has not become purified in this station from its disbelief and denial, there being no doubt of the fact that this degree is one exclusively of a form of obedient following. Yet this form is similar to the *reality* of obedient following in that it necessitates success, other worldly salvation and deliverance from the punishment of the Fire, giving the glad tidings of entry into the Garden. All this is from the perfect generosity of Allah Most High in that He does not take into consideration the state of denial of this *nafs* but suffices with Himself the conviction of the heart (*tasdīq al-qalb*) as a condition for salvation.

The second degree. This is the degree of obedient following of him in word and deed. It is associated with the inner (*bātin*) and its embellishment with noble character traits, the removal of blameworthy qualities and eradication of inner diseases and psychic illnesses. This second degree is attained by means of the station of spiritual wayfaring; a degree exclusively for the spiritual wayfarers who traverse the valley of journeying to Allah (*sayr ila Allāh*). Only those who take to the spiritual path of an emulated spiritual guide are fortunate [in arriving to] this degree.

¹ Letter fifty-four. Volume 2 to Sayyid Shāh Muhammad that faithful obedient following of the Prophet has degrees.

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The third degree. This is the degree of following him in states, tastings and ecstatic experiences. It is associated with the degree of exclusive proximity (*wilāya al-khāss*). This [third] degree is limited for people of proximity whether they be *majdhūb sālik* or *sālik majdhūb*³. When the end of exclusive proximity has been arrived to the *nafs* has become tranquil (*mutma'in*) and the obstinacy and rebellion that were of its nature subside. Denial has become compliance and disbelief has become submission. Whatever obedience emanates from this *nafs* henceforth is *real*.

When one performs the ritual prayer now, performs it with its reality, also ritual fasting and ritually obligatory alms are the same [i.e., performed with their realities].

This understanding affects all acts of the Sacred Law encompassed within the rubric of obedient following.

If it were said however: What is the meaning of the reality of ritual prayer and fasting when ritual prayer and fasting are characterized as specialized bodily acts and when these bodily acts are properly performed then their 'realities' have been attained; so what then is the form and reality?

To this I would answer: The novice's [spiritual wayfarer] *nafs* essential nature commands to evil (*amāra*) meaning that it denies the heavenly declarations. Therefore its compliance to the judgments of the Sacred Law are characterized as merely being as a form, but when that *nafs* becomes content (*mutma'in*) then it accepts the judgments of the Sacred Law contently, even longingly. At this time its compliance to the judgments are characterized as being real. The similitude of this is [as the difference between] a dissimulator and a believer.

Both the dissimulator and the believer perform the ritual prayer but the dissimulator does so while his inner self denies [its Lord and the essential truths He has given], he performs a mere form of the prayer. As for the believer due to his interior submission [to his Lord] he is endowed with the reality of ritual prayer, the distinguishing characteristic that separates form from reality is the interior state of denial or compliance.

The fourth degree. This degree is the reality of the form found in the first degree. This degree is exclusively for penetrating scholars (*'ulamā rāsikhūn*), may Allah Most High accept their efforts. They have realized obedient following after the *nafs's* attainment of tranquility. It is true that the *awliyā Allāh* attain to something of the tranquil soul after the establishment of the heart (*tamkīn al-qalb*), but the perfect completion of tranquility which occurs to the *nafs* occurs in the station of prophethood (*nabūwa*) which the scholars receive via the prophetic inheritance. So it is the penetrating scholars, by means of the tranquility of the *nafs*, who have realized the reality of the Sacred Law, which is the reality of obedient following.

We would like to clarify the distinguishing signs of the penetrating scholar lest any scholar of the outward lays claim to being one of them, and lest he falsely assume his non-tranquil *nafs* as being tranquil. The penetrating scholar is one who has been fortunate with the ability to interpret the ambiguous statements of the Qur'ān and Sunna and has acquired a portion

³ *Sālik* – literally, spiritual wayfarer; *majdhūb* – literally, pulled. A *majdhūb sālik* is one whose affairs Allah ﷻ disposes of, not leaving him to his own *nafs* for even a second. A *sālik majdhūb* is one who is constantly in worship of his Lord without any disobedience to Him at all.

from the understandings of the secrets of the Arabic letters that begin many chapters of the Qur'ān and of any other hidden secret meanings [contained in the Qur'ān and Sunna].

Do not think this is simply the same type of interpretation given of the word 'hand' as being 'ability' and 'face' as being 'essence'. Such interpretations originate from outward knowledge; they do not touch upon the secret hidden meanings. The possessors of the knowledge of the secret meanings are the prophets, these symbolic signs i.e., the mysterious Arabic letters at the beginnings of certain verses, give indications of their (the prophets) special doings. These great ones, i.e., the established scholars, are honored with this exalted station by means of obedient following and as their inheritance, it is given to one whom He Most High wills.

Attainment to this degree of obedient following is conditioned upon tranquility of the *nafs* and arrival to the reality of obedient following of the source of the Sacred Law, upon him be peace and blessings; yet, sometimes it occurs without the means of annihilation (*fanā'*) and subsistence (*baqā'*) and without the means of spiritual journeying and attraction. It is possible for it to occur without anything of states, ecstasies, theophanies or manifestations, but it is something rare in its time. Attainment to this state via the path of the *wilāya* is more certain via another path. This other path, in the opinion of this needy one, being the path of absolute faithful obedient following of the noble sunna according to its source, peace and blessings be upon him, and avoidance of any type of innovation, one who does not avoid the 'good' innovation just as he would avoid the blameworthy will not get even a scent of this high degree. This is something difficult in this time for the world is immersed in a profound sea of innovation and content with the darkness of it, who has the ability to speak in this time of the removal innovation and the raising of the Sunna? The majority of scholars prefer innovations and assist in effacing the sunna when they give religious rulings allowing wide scope for innovations. They go so far as applying the rule of legal analogical discretion (*istihsān*) with the reason that any social benefit accrued [from such innovations justifies it] and consequently direct the common people to such practices. What a horrible thing they are doing! Misguidance has become endemic to such an extent and error common place that it has become the 'common good'! Do they not know that every perceived social benefit is not a reason for which to apply the rule of *istihsān*? The social benefit/custom envisioned by the Sacred Law is that which existed in the earlier generations (generations relatively safe from the detrimental affects of innovations) and which have occurred by the consensus of people as has been mentioned in the *Fatāwa Ghiyāthiyya*. The Shaykh of Islam al-Shahīd, may Allah Most High have mercy upon him, said that every social benefit/custom understood by the scholars of Balkh is not used in making a determination via *istihsān* but instead those set as precedent by the earlier generations. This is because they are indications of the Sunna of the Prophet, upon him be peace, so they take it because **he** establishes it, upon him be peace. If it is not so then it is not taken as legal evidence unless it is as a consensus of the people of all lands, for such a consensus is a legally binding proof. Do you not see that if a people accept as social custom the buying and selling of alcohol and dealing in interest nevertheless its legal permissibility cannot be sanctioned?

There is no doubt that knowledge of the common practice of all people and cognizance of the practice of all villages and towns is beyond the means of a person's ability, but still the social practice of the earlier generations, which was in reality established by the Prophet's precedent, is available. So what concern is there then of the blameworthy and good innovations? Association with the Prophet was sufficient to attain to perfections for his companions; every scholar from the pious predecessors attained to what he attained of *rusūkh* (penetrative knowledge) because of his obedience to the Sunna and avoidance of

disliked innovations **not** via choosing the path of the Sufis **nor** by spiritual journeying and attraction. O Allah make firm our feet upon obedient following of the Sunna and keep us far from committing any type of innovation, [accept this supplication by] means of the source of the Sunna!

The fifth degree. This degree is one dealing with his perfections, it cannot be entered into by acquired knowledge and practice, but instead simply be the blessing (*fadl*) of Allah Most High and His generosity (*ihsān*). This degree is so exalted that the previous ones do not touch upon it. These perfections are exclusively for the prophets originally but are given by Allah Most High to whom He wills by means of obedient following and inheritance.

The sixth degree. This degree exclusively concerns his state of belovedness (*muhabbat*). Just as the degree of the perfections of the prophets (and particularly the perfections of Muhammad) is given out of the blessing and generosity of Allah Most High, this degree is given by means of belovedness, which is above blessing and generosity. Only the few of the few have a portion of it. These five degrees less the first degree are all of the station of spiritual ascent (*urūj*) and all of them are bound by an uphill struggle (*su'ud*).

The seventh degree. This is the degree of descent and is a composite of all the previous degrees. This degree consists of three things: *affirmation and conviction of the heart, tranquility of the soul and equilibrium of the physical body and cessation or effacing of the physical body's transgression (tughyān)*. It is as if the previous degrees were parts of this one, it being the whole. The person who is a 'follower' in this degree is like a mirror image of the one he follows. It is as if the distinction between follower and followed has been removed. Whatever the follower takes he takes it from the origin just as the one whom he follows would, it is as if they drink from the same spring, as if they are in one embrace sitting on the same cushion. It is as though they are sugar and milk mixed together, where is the follower and where is the followed? It is impossible to separate them both when they have this relationship. What a strange thing, whatever arises in this degree upon close examination the relationship of obedient following is neither noted nor observed, the distinction between follower and followed not witnessed at all.

I knew I was not right to take the reins; it was enough to hear from behind the saddle.

The perfect follower is the one endowed with these seven degrees; as for the one who only follows in some of them he is a follower according to his station. The outward scholars are happy with the first degree, what a loss for them with their contentment with this degree. They say that obedient following is limited to this *form* of the Sacred Law and think that what is beyond this first degree is something else, they think that the path of the Sufi which is a means to attaining to these other degrees is simply something ancillary (not essential), most of them do not know a spiritual guide and simply guide themselves with *Hidāya* and *Bazdāwī*.

